

The Primary Source

Volume 27 | Issue 2

Article 3

2008

Cataloging Community Cookbooks

Hans Rasmussen

Louisiana State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rasmussen, Hans (2008) "Cataloging Community Cookbooks," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.2702.03

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol27/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Primary Source by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

Cataloging Community Cookbooks

Hans Rasmussen, Special Collections Cataloger, Louisiana State University

Whether issued by a public grammar school, a clapboard country church, or a starched-tablecloth ladies' volunteer society, a community cookbook belongs to a class wholly different from any other type of book in your library. Its clunky typeface, weak binding, tacky section dividers, and utterly nonsensical title pages plainly give away its proletarian origins. Of course, for the purposes of scholarship, there is nothing at all wrong with such humble beginnings. While once exiled by elitist librarians to the lowly and shameful book sale shelf hidden away in the corner, community cookbooks are now well recognized as rich sources for studying women's and community history and have achieved a deserved place in library special collections. The collection of Mississippi cookbooks at McCain Library & Archives at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), from which I honed the special skills and undying patience needed to catalog these items, provided the examples featured in this article. Despite the community cookbook's new trendy status, their modest birth still ought to be a warning to catalogers that they are not at all easy to describe in a MARC catalog record.

The challenge in cataloging community cookbooks derives largely from the confusing layout of their title pages. Assuming a cookbook even has one -- and a sizeable minority do not -- the title page very likely makes no sense at all. The publishers of cookbooks usually recognize that a title page is needed and will prepare something that sort of looks like one, but the information on it appears without any rhyme or reason. Words that may or may not be titles, authors, publishers, printers, or something else fill up the space on the chief source of information without any structure or clarity. For instance, *Neighborhood Delights* is the title on the title page of the unusually attractive cookbook from the New Fellowship Baptist Church in Seminary, but page ii bears the title *A Book of Favorite Recipes* and the name of the compilers, the Ladies Auxiliary of New Fellowship Baptist Church. I really do not know which title the ladies auxiliary wanted to give to its book or if *A Book of Favorite Recipes* is even a title -- it might be something else altogether -- but I accepted *Neighborhood Delights* for 245 |a because that is the title that actually made it to the title page for whatever reason. Although the names of the compilers do not show up until page ii, they still get recognition in 245 |c, but in brackets.

Similar confusion can emerge further on in the 245 title field as well. The cover of *The Holy Smoke Cookbook* of Riverside Independent Methodist Church, in addition to a rather disturbing, appetite suppressing illustration of a dreadfully emaciated chef and waiter, bears the phrase "Compiled by 4th, 5th & 6th Grades." To make things a bit worse, the other side of its front cover gives compilation credit to five named adults. I chose the adults to fill subfield c because they obviously performed the work of producing the cookbook from recipes collected by the schoolchildren. This fact lent weight to the decision to accept p. [2] of the cover as the substitute title page -- the book lacked an actual title page -- when the cover itself could just as easily have gotten star billing in this absurd dilemma. In consolation, the plucky kids still got a mention in a 500 field note.

Another quality that makes cataloging community cookbooks so confusing is that so many are published by commercial cookbook publishers headquartered in the Midwest. USM has two cookbooks entitled *A Book of Favorite Recipes* from the Woodlawn United Pentecostal Church and the Sylvarena Baptist Church because both contracted with Circulation Service of Shawnee Mission, Kansas, which used the same pre-printed title pages for each. Sadly, a more frequent

occurrence than a hackneyed title pawned off on hundreds of unsuspecting church ladies' groups is the complete lack of any title at all. These companies tend to pay very little attention to the sensibleness of their layouts and composition and commonly neglect even assigning a title; thus, applying unusual cover titles is a regrettably common practice in community cookbook cataloging. *Mary Lou Carlin Circle Baptist Young Women* and *Georgetown Baptist Church*, both published by Kansas-based Cookbook Publishers Inc., are cover titles born in the tradition of AACR2 rule 1.1B3 that accepts the name of the responsible body as the title proper if that is all there is to use. The cookbook from the Woodlawn Church of God in Columbia, published by Lawrence G. Prince Company, not only has no title page, but nothing that even appears to be a deliberate title. Ultimately, I had to use a Biblical quotation appearing on the cover even though I knew it was only part of the cover artwork along with the collage of a cross, a candle, a loaf of bread, and an ear of corn. These were the only words that could pass as a title under even the most creative reasoning. Thus, this particular cookbook is available to the world under the horribly awkward name "*I am the Bread of Life*" John 6:35.

Trouble with cover titles also may demand occasional use of the 246 field for varying forms of title. The Baptist Young Women of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Brookhaven named their cookbook *A Collection of Recipes* on its title page, but Fundcraft Publishing of Collierville, Tennessee, printed the title *Sugar 'n Spice for recipes so nice!* on the cover. Although I wanted to assume that the slogan simply was part of the cover illustration along with the cheesy picture of a Strawberry Shortcake look alike exposing her bloomers while reaching into a cupboard, its wording and prominence made it resemble a title too much to ignore. Thus, it found its place in a 246 field for a separate title appearing on the cover. Similarly, the Military Baptist Church of Sumrall neglected to inform Cookbook Publishers Inc. about what if any title to give its collected recipes. Consequently, lacking any obvious title to use, I had to impose *Kissin' Wears Out...Cookin don't!*, the folk wisdom inscribed around the cover illustration of an overly amorous Victorian husband bothering his pert young bride at the stove in a prosaic scene of *fin de siècle* domestic happiness. If the title was not disappointing enough, its contracted gerunds mandated the use of a 246 field to restate this connubial insight with the words kissing and cooking spelled out for those patrons not searching with loose phrasing.

Often more troublesome than clarifying a title is deciding just who actually published a cookbook. Sometimes the name of the publisher is obvious. The first page of *Seasoned with Love at First Presbyterian Church of Hattiesburg* clearly declares it was published by Cookbooks by Morris Press of Kearney, Nebraska. Similarly, *Feeding Our Flock* from Spring Hill United Pentecostal Church in Wesson undoubtedly was published by Fundcraft Publishing, although you have to turn over five pages before you discover that fact. Unfortunately, other cookbook publishers are not so easy to identify. *Blessings from Our Kitchen* is the cover title of the cookbook produced by the Eddie McDonald Circle of St. Paul United Methodist Women in Hattiesburg. The prominence of the organization's name on the cover ought to suggest it is the publisher, but Cookbook Publishers Inc. is the declared publisher on page [2]. The title page of *Neighborhood Delights* also prominently features the name of the church that produced it, but in this case the New Fellowship Baptist Church in Seminary is the publisher because the G&R Publishing Company of Waverly, Iowa, is identified clearly as the printer on the title page's verso. Likewise, the place of publication of *Into the Second Century: Favorite Recipes of French Camp Academy* is French Camp, Mississippi, both because of its prominence on the title page and the identification of Wimmer Brothers Books of Memphis as only the printer on page 2. And the publisher? Probably French Camp Academy itself, but officially only [s.n.]. Admittedly, as much as I want to trust that identified publishers and printers actually did what they are credited as having done -- and so much of cataloging is based on such blind, hopeful trust -- I still know that community cookbook creators use the words publish and print

arbitrarily without much thought as to what these words precisely mean, so even seemingly clear statements on production may not be worth nearly as much as they seem. Anyway, whether the issuing organization is the publisher or not, it still should receive additional recognition in an added entry field (710).

The need to estimate a date of publication is also a very common chore with community cookbooks as undated titles are not at all rare. An inscription from a donor to an ungrateful recipient may suggest a date, as may some hint in the text. The undated *Hawkins Recipes* was sold to raise money to send Hawkins Junior High School students from Hattiesburg to Washington, D.C. in 1996, thereby hinting at a possible date of publication. While indirectly stated publication dates are not uncommon, other investigative powers are needed to estimate dates for other books. I dated *Microwave Cooking* by the Mississippi Power Company to sometime during the golden age of microwave cookery in the 1980s owing to the drawing of the antique faux wood-paneled microwave oven on its cover and the common knowledge that by the early 1990s everyone had pretty much accepted that it was impossible to actually cook anything in a microwave. Similarly, I judged the Mississippi Nurses' Association's *Miss. R.N. in the Kitchen* as probably belonging to the early 1960s from the style of its binding; the simple, minimal appearance of its advertisements; the drawing of the stylistically pretty nurse on the cover; and the demeaning "recipe for preserving a husband" on page 139.

The elements in the physical description field (300) can become quite annoying to describe when strictly interpreting cataloging rules in the face of a poorly prepared publication. Awkward page numbering schemes are very, very common in community cookbooks. Something like "A-D, 90, A-G, [18] p., [18] p. of plates" is a regrettably common string for subfield a. Counting unnumbered plates can become awfully tiresome as well. Almost every cookbook includes unnumbered card stock pages separating the hors d'oeuvres from the poultry from the desserts. Since these pages lie outside the regular numeration scheme and usually are printed on both sides, they should be counted as unnumbered pages of plates. When supplied by cookbook publishing companies, these dividers commonly bear photographs of especially garish food collages heavy on lacquered hams, deeply stratified casseroles, and excessively-frosted sheet cakes that look like the product of a socially ambitious yet emotionally unstable WASP hostess on Prozac. As painfully unappetizing as it all might appear, they are still illustrations and count as such in subfield b. The simple line drawings that the locally-produced cookbooks tend to use in their section dividers are also illustrations, but these always possess an honest, unpretentious dignity sadly missing in the industrialized cookbooks trucked out of America's heartland.

The 5XX notes fields seldom are problematic, although some cookbooks include an index in the back that really is not one. For example, the otherwise refreshingly coherent *Mississippi Dessert Cookbook* from Southeastern Baptist College in Laurel and the Women's Missionary Auxiliary of the Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi includes an index that, upon closer inspection, is really a table of contents and thus should not be mentioned in a note field. This kind of thing is not uncommon in community cookbooks. They are kind of like those weird European novels that put the table of contents strangely in the back and call it a "register" or something.

At USM, we used the same three 6XX fields for all community cookbooks, thus making subject description very uncomplicated and uniform. Following LCSH's directions for describing books on an individual cooking style in a specific locale, we applied the paired subject headings "Cookery, American--Southern style" and "Cookery--Mississippi" to each record. They were joined by the very handy genre index term "Community cookbooks." The first subject heading accounted for the classification number TX715.2.S68 (Home economics--Cookery--Cookbooks--1800- --American--By style of cookery, A-Z--Southern style) that we applied to all community cookbooks in our

collection. Occasionally I added another subject term if obviously needed, but it was something quite rare to do. For instance, cookbooks limited to a specific type of cooking might warrant the application of an additional term like "Desserts" or "Cookery (Seafood)." *A Taste of Christmas*, a booklet comprised of photocopied leaves and bound with red construction paper and staples, probably was a homemade cookbook intended for distribution only to the families that had contributed to it. The rather snooty, patrician style of the language ("Christmas Eve buffet supper at the John Does'," "New Year's Day brunch at the Joseph Smiths'," etc.) and my own hasty research identifying some of the families as rather prominent in Hattiesburg society tempted me to add the subject heading "Upper class families--Mississippi--Hattiesburg" to the record. My supervisor checked my eagerness by vetoing the term, which was probably a good decision.

For what it might be worth, it seems to me that community cookbooks produced locally tend to be much clearer and easier to catalog than those published by out-of-state companies. Home-grown cookbooks have clearer title pages, less murky publication credits, and more consistent page numeration than their outsourced competitors. The Mississippi-produced *Cooking by the Book* offers an unambiguous cover title and the plain declaration "Published by the Mississippi Library Association, September 1988." It clearly names its editor and other contributors and thankfully includes no plates, only recipes. The one community cookbook in USM's collection that most resembles an actual book is *Come on in!* from the Junior League of Jackson. It was professionally produced in-state with unusually decent ring binding, artsy photography, an ISBN, and publication information that actually makes sense. It is the cookbooks quickly slapped together by careless Midwestern publishers that tend to be more aggravating to catalog, owing to their neglect of any and all sensible structure, their overuse of section dividers, and the addition of separately-numbered add-on segments with advice on preserving fruit and diagrams of dismembered livestock. Nonetheless, all community cookbooks pose some type of challenge in cataloging since their origin, which is seldom logical, does not harmonize easily with existing cataloging standards. I just do not think our cataloging lawgivers had these types of publications in mind when they set down the rules for describing books in the English-speaking world. So, sadly, cataloging community cookbooks just is not as quick and easy as the recipes they contain.

Hans Rasmussen received his MLIS emphasizing archives & records enterprise from the University of Texas at Austin. He has worked at the University of Southern Mississippi as a project archivist for the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection and as a catalog librarian in the Bibliographic Services Department. He currently is special collections cataloger at Louisiana State University.
